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THE NEW ORLEANS NEWSPAPER FILES OF THE TEXAS  
REVOLUTIONARY PERIOD.

ALEX. DIENST.

In the year eighteen hundred and thirty-five there were less than one thousand newspapers published in the United States. Of this number about thirty-five were daily publications, and of these thirty-five the city of New Orleans could boast of five. This looks like a large proportion for New Orleans, but we must remember that at that time New Orleans was the third largest city in the United States, having an actual population of seventy thousand, and a transient population estimated at over thirty thousand. From a commercial standpoint it was the second city in the Union.

The standard of journalistic character, capacity and resources of these New Orleans dailies was as high as that of any in the United States. Their editors were regarded as chiefs of their respective parties, and besides their editorial work were frequently called upon to draw up the platforms, resolutions and addresses of their parties. In the very nature of things, therefore, whatever measures they endorsed were adopted by their readers; and so of necessity their personal influence, exerted through their facile pens, meant much to the revolutionary party in Texas. New Orleans was the city through which ninety per cent of the immigration, and more than ninety per cent. of the financial aid in the revolution came to Texas; and it was the city that gave to the Texans their strongest moral support. This support, the most valuable help that could be given, it gave abundantly. The editorials favorable to the Texan cause, of which examples will be given in this article, were such as only a Southron whose heart is fired with patriotism could write.

The value of newspapers as a source of history is underestimated by most people, and by many students. Dr. A. B. Hart, professor of history in Harvard University, in his *Method of Teaching American History*, speaking of his authorities classifies them in this order of importance: first, official publications; second, legal pub-

lications; third, newspapers; fourth, biographies; fifth, works of statesmen; sixth, constitutional histories; seventh, general histories. John Henry Brown, in the preface to his *History of Texas*,<sup>1</sup> concerning the value of the newspaper sources of history, says: "Much of interest, in the very nature of things, resulting from the want of official records, the absence in large part of current newspaper files, and the failing memory of many old and patriotic men, must remain untold."

Admitting then the value of newspapers as a source of Texas history, we come to the question, what newspapers were in existence in Texas during the period from June, 1835, to August, 1836,—the actual fighting time of the Texas revolution, and a period for which in studying we should desire all the details obtainable. In January, 1835, the *Texas Republican* was the only paper published in Texas, and it was discontinued in August, 1835, when hostilities had just commenced. In Bancroft's enumeration of early Texas newspapers, he says:<sup>2</sup> "The fourth paper is of historic interest, being the *Telegraph*, which was started by Gail and Thomas H. Borden and Joseph Baker at San Felipe in August, 1835. When that town was abandoned by the government in April, 1836, on the approach of the Mexicans, the press was conveyed to Harrisburg, and while the twenty-second number was being printed the forces of Santa Anna entered the town. Six copies only had been struck off when the printers, press and type were seized by the Mexicans. The material was thrown into Bray's Bayou." One of these six copies Mr. Bancroft mentions as still in existence; he does not, however, inform us where.<sup>3</sup> The *Telegraph* was not published again until August, 1836. So during this interval, fraught with such stirring events, from April to August, Texas was without a newspaper, and the siege of the Alamo, Fannin's massacre, the battle of

<sup>1</sup>See Vol. I, p. 4.

<sup>2</sup>*North Mexican states and Texas*, Vol. II, pp. 548-549.

<sup>3</sup>I have in my collection Vol. I, No. 21, the last copy printed in San Felipe. It is a very interesting number, and among much other historical matter gives the details of the Alamo fight and its participants so far as then known, and the last letter written by Travis. The files of the *Telegraph*, though very incomplete, are very valuable.

San Jacinto, General Gaines' attitude on the frontier, the flight of the people before the Mexican army, the cruising of the fleet, the blockading of the port of Matamoros, and many other important events would have been left bare facts if it had not been for detailed accounts furnished to the New Orleans daily journals by Texan correspondents. Every vessel that arrived in the New Orleans harbor from a Texas port was eagerly visited by representatives of the press, and the papers would always give information from Texas the most prominent place in their columns and have it appear headed.

While facts are what the historian is after, and battles and their results, and the doings of political parties and factions are the main things that draw his attention, yet he must not ignore nor leave unrecorded the feelings and sentiments of a people living on the border of a land in the throes of a mighty revolution. It does seem to me that our historians dwell too little on the great moral support given Texas by the people of New Orleans. The New Orleans Greys, who did so much to assist Texas in her struggle for liberty, undoubtedly came on account of patriotic editorials in New Orleans papers. The people of New Orleans and of the United States at large were naturally disposed to side with their kith and kin beyond the Sabine; but the feeling lay dormant, and it took editorials breathing patriotism in every line to awake them into *doing* something helpful. This awakening the editors felt to be their task, and nobly they did their work; just as in the late Spanish-American war the sentiment in favor of helping the Cubans was created by the press, which thus became undeniably the direct cause of the war. So in the days of the revolution Texas could not have succeeded if the journals of New Orleans and of the United States had not befriended her; and especially the press of the city of New Orleans, whence came, as I stated before, ninety per cent. of the sinews of war. What made the editorials strong and convincing was the fact that truth and patriotism of the heart, and not of party, dwelt in every word and sentence. They represented the individual thoughts of the writers; since at that time the political parties had not begun to cast covetous or jealous eyes upon Texas soil. And so their ideas were not the reflections simply of their party's policy, but of their earnest, heartfelt sympathy. At this period the abolitionist had not commenced his campaign against the acquisition of more slave ter-

ritory, and the sympathy and prayers of almost all the people of the United States were with Texas and her gallant defenders.

I say *almost* all the people, because here and there a paper espoused the Mexican cause, or by its silence betokened its enmity to that of the Texans; and it was so in the city of New Orleans. One of its five journals was opposed to Texas and hostile in a marked degree to all efforts to give any aid to the revolutionists; but this paper was helpful by giving the others an opportunity to refute its charges and make the righteousness of the revolution all the more apparent. From the historian's standpoint such journals make material all the more for his use, since if there has been any misrepresentation, assuredly the hostile paper has been keen enough to discover it and make much of it.

The five daily newspapers of New Orleans at the time of the Texas revolution were: the *Commercial Bulletin*, editor, Mr. Putnam Rea; the *Bee*, editor, Judge Alexander C. Bullitt; the *True American*, editor, Major John Gibson; the *Courier*, editor, Peter K. Wagner; and the *Post and Union*, editor, Mr. Carter. There was one more paper published in New Orleans, but from the clippings I have I am unable to state whether it was a daily or a weekly. I think, however, it was also a daily. It was the *Louisiana Advertiser*, edited by Judge Hawkins. These publications were friendly to Texas, with one exception, the *Post and Union*, which, as some of the editorials will show, was a violent enemy. None of them are in existence today—under the names they then had. I think the *New Orleans Picayune* is the oldest paper in New Orleans, and it was founded in 1837. From correspondence with this paper I find they have complete files from that date. As to files of the other papers I was referred to the custodian of the city archives of New Orleans, Mr. M. Pohlmann. He writes: "I examined the files of papers in my office. I have the *Courier* June 13 to November 30, 1836. The *Commercial Bulletin*, first file, I have 1839, and I have *Louisiana Advertiser* January 7 to March 31, 1836."

Whether there are any other files for the period of the revolution in Texas or the city of New Orleans I cannot say. I have made diligent inquiry, but can find none. My files of the *Commercial Bulletin* are complete for matters relating to Texas from about July, 1835, to July, 1837; and of the *Bee* for the period of December,

1835, to December, 1836. Of the *Courier*, the *True American*, the *Post and Union* and the *Louisiana Advertiser* I have only clippings relating to the most important events going on in Texas; but these are all very valuable to the student. From an acknowledgment among my papers I find that William Kennedy had access to a portion of these files in gathering material for his history of Texas. Mr. Kennedy was a "philosophical" more than a "detail" historian, if I may use the expression, and I find he made very little use of the journals. The future historian of Texas, whether his writings are in the form of monographs or of a complete history, must use such material extensively, or the time will come when he will find his work superseded by that of some one who does appreciate them at their true value. For illustration's sake, I trust I shall be pardoned in speaking of my own experience. For two years I have been making a special study of the navy of the Republic of Texas. From contemporaneous newspapers alone, leaving out all documents, can be gathered over a hundred pages of historical matter relating to the *first* navy of the Republic, or the one which belonged to the actual revolutionary period; and the amount of material has so appalled me that I have about decided to confine my effort to this first navy. Yet with all this and other valuable sources available, not a single historian gives the first Texas navy as much as a dozen pages, and some do not give it a dozen lines. The same remarks are applicable to many other special subjects in Texas history.

Following are some complete editorials and extracts from others that appeared in the New Orleans papers in 1835-1836. They are words which inspired men to enlist for Texas, to give to Texas, and to die for Texas.

From the *Louisiana Advertiser* of the 11th of June, 1835:

"We have just received the following documents lately circulated in Texas; by which it appears the colonists are preparing to stand to their arms rather than submit to a military despotism, which Santa Anna was preparing against them. The resolutions are bold and decided; they seem determined to rescue their governor [Mexican governor of Coahuila and Texas] and take the management of their own affairs. We trust everything will be adjusted satisfactorily, without an appeal to arms, particularly as the last resolution shows great moderation and temper. We are personally acquainted

with Dr. Archer, W. Wharton and several of the signers of the resolution, and we know them to be cool and prudent men, anxious to conciliate all parties—men who will never resort to arms if not driven by unavoidable necessity. We shall anxiously look for the next arrivals, as the last meeting was to have been held on the 28th ultimo.”

Then follow the documents, one from the chieftancy of the Department of Brazos dated June 21, 1835, and signed by J. B. Miller; and the other an account of a meeting of the citizens in the town of Columbia June 23, 1835.

Meeting of Texas sympathizers, July 14, 1835.

“In conformity with previous notice, a numerous and respectable assemblage of citizens of various States of the southwestern portion of the Union was held at the Arcade in this city on Friday evening, 14th inst. The meeting was organized by the appointment of General Felix H. Huston, of Natchez, Mississippi, to the chair, Colonel Wm. R. Hill, of Tennessee, and Dr. James F. Maclin, of Vicksburg, Mississippi, secretaries. The chair addressed the meeting in a spirited and elegant harangue, describing in a manner exceedingly touching, the wrongs and sufferings of the people of Texas, and exhibiting the necessity of immediate action on the part of friends of civil and religious freedom in their behalf; after which General H. S. Foote, of Clinton, Mississippi, arose in his place and submitted the following resolutions, and accompanied them with eloquent and appropriate remarks,”—and then follow lengthy resolutions of sympathy, etc.

From the *Commercial Bulletin*, on the departure of the New Orleans Greys for Texas:

“The Orleans Greys, or a considerable portion of the company, which have just returned from the Florida Territory, appear to be resolved upon carrying out the good work of chastising those who would imbrue their hands in the blood of our countrymen. A considerable number have joined General Green, who leaves today with his volunteers for Texas, and where we ardently hope they will find on their arrival the country in the peaceful possession of its rightful occupants, the enemy powerless, and a foundation laid for permanent peace, security and independence. They can then change their warlike weapons for implements of husbandry, and contribute

to the formation of a well ordered government, become as upright influential citizens of Texas, as they have proved themselves devoted lovers of the free institutions of the country they have left. Texas holds out a great field for the adventurous and enterprising population of our States, and soon will its vast prairies be covered with the habitations of the thrifty and industrious, and all its vast resources become gradually developed under the fostering care of a government administered by judicious and enlightened men. Civil and religious liberty will prevail over the restraining edicts of military and priestly tyranny and raise an intelligent people above the besotted ignorance and superstition that the combined efforts of a despotic state and church would fasten on them, and give them a merited rank and elevation among the powers of the earth."

Editorial from the *Commercial Bulletin*, on the news of the fall of the Alamo, March 29, 1836.

"The recent news from Texas is calculated to throw doubt and gloom over at least the speedy disenthralment of the brave Texans from the power of despot and oppression. Yet, though San Antonio has fallen and its gallant defenders, worthy of a better fate, have felt the full force of savage vengeance, and given their mangled bodies for sacrifices to an overpowering foe, still Texas is not enslaved, and the very spirit which burned in the breasts of San Antonio's defenders is kindled in the hearts of every tenant of the wood cabin and throughout the wide extent of Texas. A few such victories even will prove but discomfiture and death to the enemy himself. The disastrous fate of San Antonio will in all probability strengthen the cause of Texas, in producing a greater degree of unanimity among the Texans themselves—causing them to drop minor differences, and to concentrate all feelings, hearts and minds into one common and undivided purpose, the establishment of this independence upon a basis too firm to be overthrown by all the united forces of faction, intrigue or despotic power.

"The oppressor will find more than one San Antonio to besiege—and the same bold and determined men who there proved to him what the sinews of but few arms can effect when exerted in the defense of civil liberty—will meet him at every step of his progress, contesting it inch by inch—making each success of his numerous



horde but a speedier and more certain prelude to his final destruction.

"It is impossible for us not to have our sympathies aroused in behalf of this gallant people, and earnestly to desire that they may issue from their present struggle for the dearest and most invaluable of all rights in a manner the most successful and triumphant.

"Their cause is a good one—it is based upon the immutable foundation of natural right and justice—they are not invaders, but defenders of their constitutional rights, their homes, their altars. Who then, anxious for the establishment of free and liberal principles in Texas—in which will be sown those seeds that will eventually lead to the revolution of the whole of besotted and benighted Mexico, that will not contribute his sympathies not only, but his might and his influence for the successful attainment of such praiseworthy ends. There are men who have fallen in defense of Texas' liberty of whom history will preserve proud and enduring memorials. The names of Travis, Crockett, Bowie, Milam and others will fall to posterity as those who nobly fought and died, martyrs to their devoted attachment to the cause of humanity and right, and their stern, unyielding hatred to oppression and tyranny.

"For ourselves, we feel convinced that the recent disastrous attack on San Antonio, and the inhuman butchery of those who survived the assault, will in the end prove of signal service to the cause of Texas, in effecting a more determined and successful opposition than ever to the progress of the usurping Santa Anna. We entertain no fears as to the result."

Extract from an editorial in the *Commercial Bulletin* for March 31, 1836:

\* \* \* "In the meantime, although we invoke no infraction of the treaties established and recognized between Mexico and our country, and would not render ourselves amenable to the laws by raising troops or doing what might be regarded as violating solemn compacts—still we do say, that regarding the contest in which the Texans are engaged as a struggle for the most invaluable rights of God to man, a struggle against inhuman oppression and tyranny, they are entitled to our warmest sympathies, our best wishes, nay more, to our private contributions for their deserving need."

From the same paper, April 4, 1836:

\* \* \* "In the sacred cause of right, justice and humanity, it is no time to calculate cold policy and expediency—let us then do something for Texas. The chivalry and generosity of Louisiana cannot slumber under the appeal made to them from those who are breasting an unnatural enemy in defense of fathers, mothers, wives, children and all the nearest and dearest rights of freemen.

"Let us at least express our feelings, give of our abundance—and foremost as our citizens have been in flying to the succor of our countrymen in Florida, we are confident that the same motives will enkindle a similar spirit, and produce, as we trust in God, a similar result on the plains of Texas."

Extract from an editorial in the *Bee*, April 4, 1836:

"We feel constrained by the situation of affairs in Texas, and the fact that the people of the United States—and especially in Louisiana—have become deeply interested in the struggle of which that country is now the field, to take into consideration the propriety of acting upon the public mind, of calling the public attention to, or of soliciting through the medium of public meetings and the public papers, the interference in behalf of the people of Texas, of the people of New Orleans, or of the United States. Comparison of situation and claims have been drawn by the Texans between their situation and that of Greece, and between the present condition of Texas and that of the Union during the war of the revolution; and in the precedent found in the appeal of Greece, and which was the subject of the consideration of the Congress of the United States and which obtained much support for their cause from the people in this country; and in the call upon France, which obtained the approbation and support of the government and people of that country, during the struggles of these States for their independence, they claim for Texas a right to our encouragement and support. \* \* \* That they might ask aid from any power, American or European, or seek support by an appeal to the people of any other nation, and without referring a consideration of their cause to government—with no less justice or propriety than ourselves heretofore, would seem to be evident; and that we are bound to hear and answer their appeal not only by the reasoning that applies to the people of other civilized

nations, and with additional force to us, inasmuch as they form part of our own family, they are the offspring of our own hive, although hitherto subjects of a foreign state, but also for that we have already engaged in their behalf our own sympathy and our support to an extent that justifies them in expecting us to continue that support, and we have occasioned the embarkation of life and property in the cause of which our neglect at this time might occasion the sacrifice. The people of Texas deserve much from the consideration that they have not sought the interference of the government of this country on their behalf; their appeal is made only to the people. Their language is: 'We know and we have endeavored to exhibit to you the justice of our cause. We are in want and suffering from a cruel and implacable enemy. Assuredly you are free to give or to lend. Will you not assist us?'

"We confess we know not of the existence of any law to the contrary, and can say for ourselves that we are ready to contribute our share in support of their cause, which we hope will be soon and effectually triumphant. \* \* \* Let the sentiment be, and may it be heard wherever our language may be understood or interpreted, Texas and Liberty!"

Editorial from the *Post and Union*, April 16, 1836, and extracts from replies:

"Another Texas meeting was holden last evening at the Arcade, but we rejoice to say that not a citizen of Louisiana officiated on this occasion. The officers and speakers were all strangers; the only person we recognized was General Felix Huston, of Natchez, who acted as president. We listened with attention for the purpose of learning the condition of affairs in Texas, but no positive or accurate information was communicated to the meeting. There was an abundance of declamation about 'honor,' 'glory,' 'revenge,' 'liberty,' 'death'—and even 'immortality' was promised to those who ventured to aid the Texans. Whether this promise was held out, because the 'blood of the volunteers' has only been spilt, we know not—in conclusion we would inquire why so many 'members of conventions,' 'secretaries,' 'embassadors' and 'commissioners' are absent from Texas at this critical juncture. We expect that few believe in the immortality attending upon fighting.

"Mr. Bryan, the agent of the Texas Provisional Government in this city, has commenced suit and taken out a writ of sequestration against all the funds and property in this district belonging to the Provisional Government. It is very hard, in these degenerate times, to make 'Patriotism' and 'Pocket' meet on friendly terms."

Reply from a friend to Texas:

"Will Mr. Carter [editor of the *Post and Union*] please inform us how much a certain Mexican pays him for his remarks? The meeting on Friday was a western meeting, and we recognized some very respected persons among them, viz.: General Felix Huston, of Mississippi, General Foote, of Tennessee, and General Green. The patriotic citizens of the United States are well acquainted with the condition of affairs in Texas, if Mr. Carter is not. This Mr. Carter pretends to be an Irishman, but he would sell his birthright; he has not the soul of an Irishman. Messrs. McMullen and McGloin, founders of the Irish colonies in Texas, are now in the city; all the Irish families in the grants are flying before the Mexicans, and now on the Texas side of the Sabine and perishing for food."

Reply from the general agent for Texas:

*"To the Editor of the Post and Union.*

"SIR: My attention has been called to a paragraph in your paper of Saturday evening, in which it is asserted that 'I have taken out a writ of sequestration against all the funds and property in this district belonging to the Provisional Government of Texas.' Such is not the fact; you will therefore oblige me by inserting this communication. The new government, immediately after their inauguration into office, and before they had inspected the public documents and contracts of this agency, and without an understanding with the old government, drew for \$10,000, now in the Bank of Orleans, in favor of a highly respectable house in this city. The sum had been previously appropriated to, and had been anticipated by this agency, as it had evidently originated in a mistake from want of information of the responsibilities here. It was my duty to keep these funds in bank until the executive could be apprised of the circumstances, and give them their legitimate destination. The agency is fully sustained in its conduct by all the friends of Texas in New Orleans, which could not be the case were

your remarks correct. I am fully assured of the honor and good faith of the present government, and the public may rely upon my determination to maintain, as far as possible, the credit and faith of the government, and warrant the confidence that the public have placed in my pledge of the government credit.

“Yours respectfully,

“WM. BRYAN,

April 18, 1836.

“General Agent for Texas.”

From the *Commercial Bulletin*, June 14, 1836:

“The Texas armed schooner, Independence, commanded by Charles E. Hawkins, seven days from Velasco, Texas, anchored yesterday below the Point and fired a salute of thirteen guns. P. W. Grayson and James Collingsworth, Esqs., came in her as passengers. These gentlemen are clothed with full powers to negotiate with our government for a recognition of the independence of Texas, and will leave tomorrow for Washington city with that view. If Congress has not ere this recognized the independence of Texas, we entertain but little doubt as to its consummation upon the arrival at Washington of the commissioners.

“Would that upon the joyful commemoration of our Fourth of July we could at the same time rejoice in the effectual recognition of the independence of our sister republic of Texas.”